IN THE CLAIMS:

Re-write Claim 1 and 11 in amended form. The changes in the Claims are shown with ~~strikethroughs~~ for deleted matter and underlining for added matter. A complete listing of claims is set out below with proper claim identifiers.

1. (Currently Amended) An apparatus by means of which ~~sheet-like~~ sheet products which follow one after the other along a feed section are transferred to a conveying arrangement with individually controllable grippers which can be moved in the conveying direction and are designed for gripping the products at their leading edge, the apparatus comprising:

said feed section having, in its end region which is directed toward the conveying arrangement, a conveying nip, in which the ~~sheet-like~~ sheet products are retained, at least in part, on both sides, wherein, in the product-receiving region of the grippers, a positive stop, which is active during each product transfer, is provided for the leading edges of the products,

the positive stop is of two-part design, a first part being of stationary configuration arranged as a stop for the leading edge of the products and a movable second part being formed by a leading leg or a guide surface, connected to said leg, of a gripper taking part in the product-transfer process and serving for guiding the leading edge of the products toward the first part,

the first part and the second part forming two stop surfaces which run at an angle to one another, the spacing between the stationary first part of the positive stop and the conveying nip being selected such that the trailing edges of the products are still located in the conveying nip when the leading edges strike against the positive stop, such that the leading edge of each product abuts against the positive stop in a region of the positive stop at which the two surfaces intersect.

2.-5. Cancelled.

6. (Previously Amended) The apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the guide surface, in the closed state of the gripper, is oriented at least essentially parallel to a product abutment-surface of the trailing gripper leg.

7. (Original) The apparatus as claimed in claim 6, wherein the gripper legs can be pivoted individually and/or together about a pivot pin moving in the conveying direction and are coupled, in particular, to a transporting chain or to individual carriages.

8. (Original) The apparatus as claimed in claim 6, wherein each gripper leg, in the region of the conveying arrangement, is assigned a dedicated control guide which controls the opening and closing movement of the respective gripper legs.

9. (Previously Amended) The apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the feed section is designed as a conveying belt, a pressure-exerting belt which can be driven at the speed of the conveying belt and runs, at least in part, parallel to the conveying belt being provided in that end region of the conveying belt which is directed toward the conveying arrangement, for the purpose of producing the conveying nip.

10. (Previously Amended) The apparatus as claimed in claim 9, wherein the feed section, in its end region which is directed toward the conveying arrangement, runs in a plane which is inclined in relation to the horizontal.

11. (Currently Amended) A method of operating an apparatus as claimed in claim 1, in the case of which:

the ~~sheet-like~~ sheet products, in that end region of the feed section which is directed toward the conveying arrangement, are transported through a conveying nip until they butt, by way of their leading edges, against the positive stop in the region at which the two surfaces of the stationary first part and the movable second part of the positive stop intersect;

the conveying movement through the conveying nip is continued and a closing movement of the grippers is initiated; and

the grippers are closed completely while the trailing edges of the products are still located in the conveying nip.

12. (Original) The method as claimed in claim 11, wherein the conveying movement through the conveying nip during the closing movement of the grippers each receiving a product takes place continuously.

13. (Original) The method as claimed in claim 12, wherein the speed of the products in the conveying nip and the transporting speed of the grippers during the product-transfer process are at least essentially constant.

14. (Original) The method as claimed in claim 13, wherein the speed of the products in the conveying nip and the transporting speed of the grippers during the product-transfer process are co-ordinated with one another such that the products butting against the positive stop are buckled, or pass into a curved-out state, before the grippers are closed completely.

15. (Original) The method as claimed in claim 14, wherein the speed of the products in the conveying nip and the transporting speed of the grippers during the product-transfer process are co-ordinated with one another such that the products which are gripped by closed grippers in their front region and have their rear region still located in the conveying nip are straightened out again without the products being subjected to destructive tensile loading.

16. (Original) The method as claimed in claim 15, wherein the closing movement of the grippers is at least essentially completed while the leading edges of the products butt against the positive stop.

17. (Previously Amended) The method as claimed in claim 11, wherein a guide surface, at least over a time interval immediately preceding completion of the closing movement of the gripper legs, is oriented at least essentially parallel to the respectively trailing gripper leg.

18. (Original) The method as claimed in claim 11, wherein the products the conveying arrangements are fed in one of a regular or irregular imbricated formation or at intervals from one another.

19. (Previously Amended) The apparatus as claimed in claim 10, wherein the feed section, in its end region which is directed toward the conveying arrangement, runs in an essentially vertical plane.

20. (Previously Amended) The apparatus as claimed in claim 19, wherein the grippers, during the product-transfer, move essentially perpendicularly to the essentially vertical plane and then increasingly in the direction of the conveying nip.